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**Lawsuit accuses Colo. pastor of fraud**

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER -- An insurance company sued a prominent Denver minister and four of his affiliated church groups Tuesday, accusing them of filing fraudulent life-insurance claims on behalf of parishioners.

AIG Life Insurance Co. claims the Rev. Acen Phillips and other defendants obtained a group life insurance policy on behalf of as many as 316 people and falsified paperwork to ensure that the bulk of any claims payments would go to them, not surviving family members of those who were covered.

The company paid \$638,131 under the scheme - more than half of which went to Phillips and other defendants, the lawsuit said. AIG terminated the group-life policy Nov. 30, 2006, after paying seven claims, according to court documents.

The lawsuit said AIG issued the group-life policy based on Phillips' statements that it would cover Baptist ministers employed full-time by their churches. But the defendants signed up congregants for insurance coverage and altered beneficiary forms so they, rather than surviving family members, would receive more insurance proceeds, the lawsuit said.

Phillips' attorney, Gary Lozow, said through his receptionist that he had not yet discussed the lawsuit with his client and declined to comment immediately. Before the lawsuit was filed, Lozow said Phillips denied wrongdoing.

It was unclear who represented the other defendants: American Church United, Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Mount Gilead Baptist Church Youth Job Mart, and New Birth Temple of Praise Community Baptist Church.

Phillips also is under investigation by the Colorado attorney general's office, said spokesman Nate Strauch. He would not comment on the nature of the investigation.